



FOWL



Frank Henenlotter doesn't believe in putting all his eggs in one basket (case), so he made a second one! New from Medusa *Basketcase 2* is to be hotly pursued by another of this *Video World* fave's creations, *Frankenhooker*. He spoke to our own feathered friend Allan Bryce about his latest clutch.

Play

A lover of shoddy exploitation movies since he was knee high to a grasshopper, New York film-maker Frank Henenlotter didn't have to go to film school to learn his craft. His education was carried out in the fleapits of 42nd Street, wallowing in the sleaziest titles imaginable. He then burst onto the movie scene as an auteur in his own right with *Basketcase* (1982 - Palace Video), an outrageous tongue-in-cheek gore flick about a disturbed young man who carries his deformed telepathic mutant twin around in a basket. This was followed up a few years later with *Brain Damage* (1988), an equally bizarre fable about a monster parasite (called Elmer) who likes to eat brains.

Now Frank is back on the scene as the double director of two typically off-the-wall new horror flicks shot back-to-back in New York last Autumn. *Basketcase II* is twice as barmy as its predecessor, bringing back the deformed Belial and his Siamese twin brother for murderous mayhem in a house of freaks. *Frankenhooker* is a sleazy reworking of the Frankenstein story with beautiful former *Penthouse* Pet Patty Mullen coming back from the grave as Slaymate of the Month.

Both films are out on the Medusa label this month, which was all the

excuse we needed to track down Frank in his East Village hideout, a place which is decorated with posters from some of the movies that he regards as classics. These include *The Killer Shrews*, *Curse Of The Demon*,

Hideout In The Sun ('It happened in a nudist camp') and Lucio Fulci's *Zombie* (*We are going to eat you*). Most prominently displayed is Dyanne Thorne's busty *Ilsa - She Wolf Of The SS*, and it's obvious that the actress is a real Henenlotter favourite; 'Did you see her in *Real Men*', he asks. 'Dyanne was just great, I'm going to use her in a film someday, wait and see.'

First of all let's talk influences. Other directors cite Hitchcock, Welles, et al. In Frank's case we're talking Jess

Franco, a director who has made some of the very worst films in movie history (under an awesome variety of pseudonyms). If you've never seen a Franco film you're lucky. But Henenlotter insists Jess is sorely underrated. 'Look' he says 'I was loving Jess Franco movies when everybody else was still cringing when they heard his name. One of the best things I ever did on 42nd Street was to go see a double feature of *Kiss Me Monster* and *Count Sadist Erotica*. Part of the fun with Franco movies is the hunt, finding new titles that he's done under whatever name. Then, when you find something new, you say, "When the hell did he make this one,

which was shot for the unbelievably low figure of \$35,000 (The final budget was \$100,000 with post-production work on top). 'You certainly couldn't make a movie for that nowadays' he says, 'I figured it would open and close on 42nd Street overnight and that would be the end of it. I never really thought it was gonna get noticed. But in the end it made more money than it had any right to make'.

In no way would Henenlotter consider *Basketcase* or any of his films to be spoofs. 'I hate that word' I think that the dividing line between humour and horror is so thin that you have to include both. The more comedy I have in my films, the more horrible they have to be. Take *Brain Damage* for example. When Elmer's singing, is that funny or not? He's singing to a guy whose guts have been ripped out, so I don't find anything funny about it! I would be bored just doing a straight horror film. *Frankenhooker* is the closest I've come to doing a straight comedy, and that's hardly a straight comedy when you've severed heads and limbs all over the place...

Brain Damage was seen by many to be an allegory on drug-addiction. Would he agree with this? 'Sure', he smiles. 'That's a pretty narrow reading of it, but yeah, we locked into those visuals because they make the most sense. If he was addicted to literature you would have had a boring film - if Elmer kept throwing him classic novels. 'I don't think that would've worked too well. But to me, the horror of the movie wasn't drugs, it was lack of control, you know, having somebody or something else run your life'.

The impetus for *Frankenhooker* and *Basketcase 2* came when Frank met James Glickenhaus, (the director of such movies as *The Exterminator* and *The Protector* who now owns his own production company, Shapiro-Glickenhaus Entertainments). 'Jim was great', he enthuses. 'I pitched him *Basketcase 2*, and he was extremely enthusiastic because contributors had been asking for that for years. And then asked if I had any other ideas, and I had a real idiot Frankenstein story which I pitched to him in the office, embellishing it and making it up as I was going along. He thought it was hilarious- I mean, he knew I was making it up- at the end he just said "Why don't you do both?" So we shot 'em both back to back and that was it'.

Frankenhooker and *Basketcase 2* both turned out well, revealing Henenlotter's instinctive grasp of horror-absurd. And with the modest price tags of around a million and a half each, they quickly recovered their investment. 'It's probable that we'll do two more movies like that' he says, 'It's just that the independent field is getting so difficult now, that even doing back-to-back stuff is risky. There is too much junk out there. People have been churning these things out and they are mostly garbage. How many more slasher films can be made? How many more kids have to go camping in the woods and meet a cannibal family?

I mean, the amazing thing is that nobody even likes these movies. Okay, so I enjoy Jess Franco, Franco has an art, Franco has a talent, a spark of life. He's not ripping off himself. These are rip-offs of rip-offs of rip-offs. In the 50s when there was a glut of monster movies at least everyone of them had some spark of originality somewhere. The monster was a little different, or something. But these days it's the same old film over and over again. Some of them just figure they'll make up for what they lack in story with hardcore gore. But they don't do it right. It looks stupid. I'm not gonna jump if I see a fake mannequin rolled across the floor, or there's somebody with sausages tucked in their shirt and they go "Look, I'm disemboweled" You shout back; "No you're not - you've got sausages in your shirt".

I just live and breathe this genre, but I know it has to be bad when I go to a video store here in the USA to look at the horror section and I don't find anything I want to see. Every single day I'm getting something else, but it's always old material. The other day I found an old copy of *Women of the Prehistoric Planet*. I don't need art, I just need something a little bit different and good, you know?

Another target for Henenlotter criticism is the Motion Picture Association of America, the powerful board that hands out ratings for films released in the USA. 'The MPAA is having an industry backlash directed against them now', he explains, 'because they don't know the difference between an R (restricted to seventeen year-olds and over) and an X (generally reserved for pornography) anymore. They gave *Frankenhooker* an X, which was the most stupid decision

'If we had filled those bodies up with meat, blood, squibs or even red powder, you would be vomiting instead of laughing. But this was supposed to be a comedy, not a horror film at all'

you know? What week was he free".

He also reveals that he NEVER goes to see major studio releases because he inevitably finds them boring. 'I won't go to see any film that has Stephen King's name attached to it, or Steven Spielberg's. But what the hell, promise me some obscure nudist flick from the 50s and I'll go out of my way to catch it. It has to be different and breaking a taboo'. He shrugs apologetically. 'I'll never be satisfied until I see every sleazy film ever'. He never planned on a career making movies, but as with so many of today's directors, started out shooting his own 8mm epics simply for fun, (and maybe to enter in *Video World* competitions... see page 62 - Ed). This fun was not shared with his family, who thought their offspring's efforts at comedy were extremely sick and morbid. These early productions had titles like *Son Of Psycho*, *Slash Of The Knife*, and *Lurid Women* ('They came out of the night, crawling and drooling and making shameful noises') No wonder his parents considered taking him to an analyst!

Eventually this fascination with sleaze cinema led him to scrape the money together to make *Basketcase*,



that I've heard in my life. It has no blood in it at all! What they are rating X is the dirty word Hooker. I don't think that they could get past it. They just sat there shaking, saying "It's about Hookers". Surprisingly, he has kinder words for our own dear, sophisticated BBFC. *Brain Damage* was meant to be excessive, as it was meant for US X-rated video tape but when they saw Brian pulling his brains out of his ear they laughed and said, "It's make believe, it's fantasy. It's not even violent because he's not hurting anybody." When the MPAA saw the same scene, they said, "Oh My God! Call the police, hurry. Dealing with MPAA is like dealing with children. You guys don't know how lucky you are..."

Quite honestly what it all comes down to here in the US is politics, that's all. They release a \$63 million picture with Arnold Schwarzenegger ripping arms off and gouging eyes out, and all this other stuff and they call it *Total Recall* and the MPAA says "It's an R- no problem". None of the violence in *Frankenhooker* could happen in real life. It's all make believe violence. They say that I should take out the exploding woman. But that scene is

played for laughs, not gore. If we had filled those bodies up with meat, blood squibs, or even red powder, you would be vomiting instead of laughing. But this was supposed to be a comedy, not a horror film at all.'

Both films represent a considerable step forward for Henenlotter in terms of budget and effects. Those who saw the original *Basketcase* will remember just how cheap looking the animation of the grotesque Belial was. 'The effects in the first one were horrible' he agrees 'I did them all myself. The first time I looked at the scene where Belial was moving around I threw the reel across the room. I picked it up about two weeks later and it cracked me up! I had to remove most of the scenes showing Belial because they were even worse'.

Belial looks a lot more impressive in *Basketcase 2*, and he is only one of the cast of the fearsome freaks who make this such an unforgettably odd viewing experience. It is bound to be a major success, and therefore it comes as little surprise to learn that one of the scripts Frank is currently working on is *Basketcase 3* (God help us all, he jokes). The other is one he doesn't want to discuss yet- Just one final question. Would he ever consider abandoning

the exploitation field to make a serious drama about real people and their problems? I'm surrounded by real people all my life. I don't want to pay money into a movie theatre and watch real people up there, let alone make my own movie about them. I want larger than life. I don't want reality. I want Jess Franco. Is that so much of a crime? Some folks would say so, but not me.

And we wouldn't have you any other way Frank.

WICKER SNICKERS

TEN COPIES OF MEDUSA'S BASKET CASE 2 TO BE WON.

Arch-Sicko Frank Henenlotter is once again putting all his heads in one basket. He's come up with a follow-up to *Basket Case* and if you want to see it for yourself just tell us which of these is the correct definition of macrame;

- A: A tropical bird
- B: An Italian dish
- C: A South American Republic
- D: None of these

Send your answers on a postcard to; Sew You Think We're Kidding Comp., Video World Magazine, The Northern & Shell Building, PO Box 381, Millharbour, London E14 9TW. Entries in by 15th October so get weaving.

COMPETITION